



Organ Lutheran Church

Rowan County, North Carolina

Founded 1745



A BRIEF HISTORY
November 1993





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ZION ORGAN LUTHERAN CHURCH

The church had its beginning as a fellowship of like believers who met at log structures in Eastern Rowan County. They did not have the privilege of Pastoral Leaders nor did they enjoy the privilege of a "church". The use of the phrase "church" was limited to only the Church of England, later the Episcopal Church, by the crown. These hardy settlers would meet at a house, usually of log construction, called a "meeting house." The first such "meeting house" has been referred to in historical documents as the "*Hickori Church*." It was located at a spot in what is now the St. Peter's Church cemetery, just east of the current town of Rockwell, NC. A large stone obelisk marks the meeting house site and purports, by it's verbage, that the meeting house dates from 1745-47 and is said to be the first site of Lutheranism in North Carolina.

It could also be likewise referred to as the birthplace of the Reformed Church, now called the United Church of Christ, as both met at the meeting house in the mid 1700s.

In the years 1760 to 1780, Rowan County, which then comprised the Northwest quadrant of North Carolina or about 27 counties, there developed a section of Rowan called "German's Lands." It comprised an area from Dutch Second Creek in what is now Rowan County to Coddle Creek in what is now Cabarrus County. These earliest Germans, who had attended the meetings for worship and fellowship at the "Hickory Meeting House" soon decided to have meeting houses in their local areas. There evolved two such houses, the Zion Dutch Second Creek meeting house and one in Cabarrus County which later became known as St. Johns in the current Cabarrus County area, located on Buffalo Creek.

Since this article is about Zion, we now turn our attention to detail as to when this occurred. The known facts are that a group of Lutheran believers met at a meeting house on Dutch Second Creek in 1772 and selected two delegates to go to Germany and attempt to secure a Lutheran pastor and a school teacher for their group. Christopher Rintleman of the Zion Dutch Second Creek meeting house group and Christopher Layerle of the Cabarrus group were elected delegates to request assistance of pastors and other worship materials. They were to make the requests of the Consistory of Hanover in Germany. Since the colonies were under the English crown, they first visited the English for permission to bring the German preachers into the English territory. The King gave his permission and was sufficiently impressed that he,

GIFT OF JIM HURLEY



with members of his court, and members of St. James Lutheran Chapel in London gave gifts and cash equivalent to about \$800. A communion chalice was also an item given to the delegates. An obvious reason for the approval is that of taxation which the crown would receive from the area development.

The delegates were also favorably received at Hanover, Germany. The Consistory of Hanover selected two men; Adolphus Nussman, as pastor, and Johann Gottfried Arends as schuldiener (teacher). Their diaries record their arrival, via Charleston, and their ride on horseback from Charleston to the Rowan site in 1773.

Adolphus Nussman was thus the first permanent Lutheran pastor in North Carolina. His diary and church records authenticate that he preached at the "Hickori Church." Thus, he was obviously at what is now the St. Peter's Lutheran Church site east of Rockwell. After one year he went to the Cabarrus site which is now St. John's Lutheran.

We can and must assume that Arends began his school at a log structure on the Zion Dutch Second Creek area on the site that is now Organ. No record exists that records the building of a first structure there. We do note that a group of Lutherans had met there in a structure in 1772 when they elected the delegates. Thus, I suggest the following series of events.

The first known resident of a 701 acre site in East Rowan from which the original church deed came was David Jones, the first High Sheriff of Rowan County in 1753. He obviously resided on this site in a log structure. In 1758 he sold the 701 acres to Hugh Montgomery. In 1762 Hugh Montgomery sold the site to William McConnell. McConnell then sold to John Frohock and John's sons, serving as his executors, gave a deed to Ludwig Siffert on May 8, 1777. I submit that Ludwig Siffert entered a lease-purchase agreement in 1767, the year that he migrated from Upper Milford Township, Pennsylvania. The property was not transferred until 1777 due to the fact that he did not complete the purchase until after Ludwig Siffert had sold his property in Pennsylvania in 1775 to a Hans Schantz. We submit as further evidence that he acquired a resident title to the property, the fact that he was appointed an overseer of a road with one other resident and the Court of Manumission records indicate that this was done in 1768. They were also charged with laying off the road from the courthouse (then at the square of Salisbury) to Lord Granville's line (this would be the Cabarrus County line). He obviously had acquired the 701 acre tract or he would not have been so appointed. He also was named as a "sessor" (tax) for Captain George H. Berger's district. He appears in the

tax scroll of 1778 for Rowan County.

We can further guess that he wintered that first year of 1767-68 in the log structure that had been erected by David Jones, Rowan County's first high sheriff. He later built a separate log house into which he moved. A Sifford house was located to the east of Dutch Second Creek and was last lived in by Henry Rothrock Seaford (Sic) until it burned about 1900.

On August 16, 1786, it is recorded in Book 11, page 408 that: "Laotevik Sefret, of Rowan County, no wife signs, lets the Lutheran Elders and Trustees of Second Creek Organ Meeting House congregation have ten acres, next to George Henry Berger, including the meeting house, school house and other buildings for five pounds, witnessed by Johannes Steigerwalt and Bostian Lentz and proved by the latter in May 1788. (This is a part of the 701 acre tract)." (McCubbins Files, Rowan Public Library)

This deed is obviously the first time the Zion (Organ) congregation acquired title to their property. Three years later, John Rentleman deeded an additional ten acres to the congregation. Finally Rumble's History, page 389, states: "Organ Church was started in 1774 by George Ludwig Siffert, Leonhard Siffert, Wendel Miller, Peter Edlemann, Johannes Steigerwalt, Phillip Cruse and Peter Steigerwalt." (see further references)

Several prior publications have recorded that the first property of Organ Zion congregation was deeded by the Rendleman family but this is obviously an error as is herein shown.

I am confident that the first school, taught by Gottfried Arends was probably the same log meeting house wherein the Lutheran members met in 1772 when they elected delegates to go to Germany, and this structure did double duty as a school and meeting house until a second log structure was built. The Arends diary in notes of January 6, 1782 records: "Second Creek communion - Wilhelm Siffert" and on July 4, 1783: "Communion in the "new" church - George Siffert." The underlining is my addition for emphasis. I suggest the adjective "new" refers to the date that a second log structure was built as a church site at the Dutch Second Creek location. It also explains the reference in the Siffert deed to two specific log structures - meeting-house and school-house. The other "bldgs" would refer to outdoor toilets.

Other data found by this researcher which supports the remarks of the Reverend Jethro Rumble previously alluded to in this text is a deed for 218 acres just north of the Dutch Second Creek site now comprising Organ Church property. The deed appears in Rowan County and

records the transfer of 218 acres from a Samuel Shirm (Shinn) to Ludwig Siffert, Peter Edelmann and Johannes Steigerwalt, in Joint tenancy. This unusual joint holding caused me to follow the property. It also initially caused me not to believe these Germans were in Rowan that early until I discovered that they reappeared on communion records in Pennsylvania on Easter of 1767.

This 218 acre tract was sold by the three men to Gottfried Arends after he arrived from Germany. The Arends diary also makes references to advancements of silver to Ludwig and Leonhard Siffert which some have construed as loans. The two Sifferts were actually building Arends' house on the above site. If one follows the Arends diary, it records the fact that Arends settled up with Ludwig Siffert, "except that he owes me some panes of glass and two light door bands." The diary also records a bond that he required of Ludwig Siffert, Peter Edelmann and Johannes Steigerwalt for 4000 pounds. This was not a loan as some have assumed, but is or was the result of a challenge to the deed of the three men by Shinn heirs who claimed that Samuel did not have full authority to sell that land. The claim was denied and the bond thus became a non-entirety. Arends later sold the site to the Rendleman family when he moved to Lincoln County.

The deed of the church site by Ludwig Siffert to the Zion elders occurred just three years prior to his death in 1789. The home place of Ludwig was willed to his youngest son Abraham but he was not yet age 21 so he selected John Rendleman, a next door neighbor, as his guardian until he reached legal age. It is also noted that Ludwig had been John's guardian for a like reason when Christopher Rendleman died. (NC State Archives)

The historic stone church, which still stands at Zion Organ Lutheran Church on County Route 1006 was quite long in construction. It is stated in the Lentz Heritage publication that cement could not be obtained for bonding the stones together and wagon trips were made to Charleston, SC for loads of oyster shells which were pulverized and mixed with lime to form a mortar in which the stones were bonded. A stone in the west peak of the structure contains the date 1794, which is the year the structure was completed.

The first official church register was established in 1788 by the third Lutheran Pastor, the Reverend C.A.G. Storch on his arrival from Germany. The record book remains in existence and is in good condition. A translated copy of the book is at the Edith Clark History Room of the Rowan Public Library, Salisbury, NC.

Prior to 1786 Johannes Steigerwalt built a pipe organ into the log

meeting house which preceded the current stone church. This was the first such instrument in the South. The church, named Zion, was soon referred to as the church with the organ and then the "Organ Church," so that name has been adopted by the congregation. When the stone church was completed in 1794, the organ was moved into the gallery facing the high wine-stem pulpit, and continued in use for about a hundred years. When it was dismantled, it's parts were made into yardsticks and sold as mementos to the members. It is hoped that some will be donated back to the church for exhibits.

The Reverend Storch records in Organ Church records that in 1774, the following members of our congregation commenced to build the so-called "Organ Church":

Jurg Ludwig Siffert (George Lewis Sifford), Wendell Miller, Peter Edelman (Eddleman), Johannes Steigerwalt (John Stirewalt), Philip Gruss (Cruse), Peter Steigerwalt (Stirewalt), Michael Guthmann (Goodman), Christoph Bless (Christopher Pless), Leonhard Siffert (Leonard Sifford), Jacob Klein (Cline), Anton J. Kuhn (Anthony J. Koon), Georg Henrich Berger (George Henry Barger), Christopher Guthmann (Christopher Goodman), Johannes Rintelmann (John Rendleman), Johannes Eckel (John Eagle), Bastian Lenz (Bostian Lentz), Jacob Benz (Bentz), George Eckel (Eagle), Franz Oberkirsch (Francis Overcash), Johannes Jose (John Josey), Heinrich Wenzel (Henry Wensil). (Spellings printed as written with modern spellings in parentheses.)

Storch began his tenure as pastor on 26 October 1787 and the following month at St. John's, Salisbury, preaching at both churches. A set of new church regulations were adopted on 1 January 1789 and are in the church minutes. Seventy-eight persons subscribed to the salary of Pastor Storch. Storch served from 1788 to 1823 – 35 years.

The first Pastor Nussman, who preached at the Hickori Church 1773-1774 was followed by Godfrey Arends, the schuldiener who was ordained at Organ, served 1775 to 1785. Then Nussman returned 1785-1787, followed by a vacancy of one year and Storch's tenure.

The Rev. C.A.G. Storch is interred at Organ Lutheran Church cemetery. I recall his writing in his diary that he was promised a promotion

after a few years here and upon his return to Germany. Thus, I believe that his work was divinely inspired in North Carolina. Obviously, he had a tremendous impact upon his flock and has now been promoted to that eternal Kingdom of Heaven. Storch was strongly Pro-German and preached against inter-marrying with other than Germans. The following appeared in 1790 North Carolina Church Reports, edited in the Duchy of Mecklenburg and reprinted in the North Carolina Historical Review, Vol. VII, No. 2, page 244-245. April 1930: "It is in this region a very important matter. For in the first place, the Scotch-Irish in this section are lazy, dissipated and poor, live in the most wretched huts and enjoy the same food as their animals. (He probably meant corn). In the second place, it is very seldom that the German and English blood is happily united in wedlock. Dissention and feeble children are often the result. The English wife will not permit her husband to be the Master in his household, and when he likewise insists upon his rights, crime and murder ensue."

The next pastor of Organ was Daniel Scherer, 1823-1829, six years. Scherer is known to have gone into the Ohio Territory after his Organ tenure, probably following many eastern Rowan and Cabarrus residents who migrated to Southern Illinois. He did some service at Anna, Illinois. Jacob Kaempfer then served three years – 1829-1832.

The Rev. Henry Graeber (Graber), then served Organ from 1832 to 1843, eleven years. Pastor Graeber is interred in the Organ cemetery. We believe he may have been the last to promote Germanic language preaching.

The Rev. Samuel Rothrock then served from 1844 to 1866 or 22 years. He was the man in charge in a most difficult period of the church due to the senseless war which took so many of the members of Organ Church. Often pitting cousin against cousin, Rothrock made the transition from German to English sermons. He also kept a diary that is today a treasured historical document.

There followed a succession of pastors: Rev. W.H. Cone, 1 January 1866 to May 1866. He later was the pastor who formed Wittenberg Lutheran. William Artz, 1 May 1866; Samuel Rothrock returned for six months 1 July 1868 to 1 January 1869. The Rev. S. Scherer and W.H. Cone, 1 January 1869 to January 1870; and W.H. Cone again, 1 January 1870 to 1 May 1873; The Rev. W.R. Ketchie from June 1873 to January 1874; The Rev. P.A. Strobel, 1 January to October 1875; and then the Rev. Samuel Rothrock from 1 January 1876 to 1886.

During the tenure of the next pastor – the Rev. W.R. Brown (1886-1894), the old stone church was repaired and painted, the roof

was raised and made steeper, the flagstone floor was taken up and replaced with wood joists and flooring overlaid with carpet. The high wine-stem pulpit against the north wall was removed. Thus, the church was altered considerably. A metal weather vane on the roof was left off of the revised structure. During this period, the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society was organized and was one of the more active in the Synod. Mrs. Brown was the first president of this society.

The Rev. C.H. Cox served from 1894 to 1904; The Rev. C.A. Brown from 1904 to 1907; the Rev. H.A. Trexler from 1908 to 1913; the Rev. R.R. Sowers from 1914-1918, the WWI period. The Rev. L.L. Lohr served 1918-1919. The Rev. M.L. Ridenhour was pastor from 1919 to 1922, followed by the Rev. Paul L. Miller for 13 years, 1922-1936. The Rev. O.W. Aderholdt was at Organ Church from 1936 to 1954.

By 1954 when the Rev. William E. Hall came to serve Organ, the seating at service was insufficient for the attendance of its members in the old stone church. Though reluctant to give up the old church, the members turned to building a new and larger facility.

Fortunately, the members declined to destroy the old historic church electing to build a new one about 250 yards south of the old church. Ground breaking for the new facility, church and educational building, with the initial price in excess of a quarter million dollars, was held on 9 March 1958 with consecration on 25 June 1961.

The Rev. W.E. Hall departed from Organ in 1963 after nine years as shepherd of that flock. He was followed by the Rev. Ernest W. Ridenhour, 1964 to 1974. The Rev. Lawrence Bollinger served from 1975 to 1981.

During the tenure of Rev. Ridenhour a new pipe organ, built by Cassavant Freres of Quebec, Canada, was installed in April, 1972 at a cost of \$54,000.00. The organ contains 1,814 pipes ranging in size from one inch to eight feet in length. The Organ was used for the first service on June 4, 1973.

The year 1973 marked the two hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first pastor, Adolphus Nussman, and the teacher, later pastor – John Godfrey Arends and the subsequent spread of Lutheranism in this area. A monuent which celebrated their arrival was unveiled in an area between the old historic and new church.

During the pastorate of the Rev. George David Swygert, 1981-1992, the congregation voted to air condition the new church and the Educational Building at a cost of \$103,000.00 The system was first used on June 16, 1985. Pastor Swygert elected to leave the Organ congregation in 1992 in mid-year. The congregation then extended a call to the

Rev. John E. Pless. He accepted but could not come for a couple of months. The congregation then voted to renovate the church parsonage at a cost of \$25,000.00

In 1993, the large membership of Organ was such that it needed an assistant pastor to help with visitations of some of its aged members. It was the wish of the membership to employ the Rev. Howard G. Baker as an assistant pastor. He had also served as a vice pastor in the transition of Swygert to Pless.

In 1993, it was pointed out by the church's Historical Committee that major renovations were necessary to save the old historic stone church school building. Architectural estimates place the minimal needs for this in excess of \$139,000.00. The Historical Committee then recommended to the church council that the church establish a non-profit foundation under chapter 501 (c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code, which is believed would enhance the ability of other foundations and businesses to participate in the care of this most treasured National Historic Site. The foundation called – “Historic Organ Church Foundation, Inc.” has now been established and conditionally approved by IRS, after examination of its Charter and By-Laws.

The purpose of the foundation is to raise funds with which; (1) to preserve, repair and restore the Historic properties within the stone wall; (2) to hopefully raise sufficient funds to endow the care of those properties in (1) above; and (3) eventually establish a mini-museum in the renovated Sunday school stone structure.

The item (3) was added when it was recorded that over 430 visitors came to this facility from January 1, 1992 to May 1, 1993. The urgent goal of \$190,000.00 will be used to repair and save the Church School Building. We then hope to obtain approximately a quarter million dollars to endow and maintain the facility in perpetuity.

This history has clarified the past history of this congregation. We believe the first school operated by Arends may have been and likely was the original residence of David Jones, first High Sheriff of Rowan County. It may also have been a temporary residence of Ludwig Siffert, in 1767-68 before he built his home on the property. The first structure as a church was likely that referred to in the Arends diary as the “new” church in 1774. The first log church was torn down when the historic stone church was built in 1794. The second log structure was replaced by the historic stone church school structure.

History prepared by:

Harry T. Sifford, President

Historic Organ Church Foundation, Inc.



